

If there is anything worthy of the Senate's attention, if there is any issue that merits debate on this floor, it is protecting our democracy from the forces that are trying to unravel it from the inside out.

That is why this afternoon, the U.S. Senate will vote to begin debate on the Freedom to Vote Act.

The Freedom to Vote Act is a balanced, effective, and commonsense proposal that will fortify our democracy and protect Americans' right to vote. It sets basic standards for all Americans to vote safely and securely, no matter what ZIP Code they live in. It adopts proven reforms that will protect voters from both parties, whether they live in blue States or red States or purple States. It fights back against the power of dark money in politics and ends the toxic practice of partisan gerrymandering. And, all the while, it respects the rightful authority of States to carry out their elections.

At its core, the Freedom to Vote Act rests on a simple principle: Americans must be able to freely choose their leaders, and those leaders must be accountable to the people, not to well-heeled donors.

These are policies all Americans can get behind. When was the last time we heard Americans cheer about dark money in our elections or the pervasiveness of partisan gerrymandering? What sort of voter would willingly choose to make voting harder—arbitrarily harder—when it should be easy, safe, and secure? The Freedom to Vote Act would provide long-overdue remedies for all these concerns.

Now, crafting this bill, as you know, Mr. President, was no easy feat. It took months of hard work, compromise, and gathering feedback from experts on sensible policies that have been proven to work. I want to thank all of my colleagues who dedicated their energies to making this moment possible, and I want to especially thank Senator MANCHIN for his hard work over the past few weeks. He has reached across the aisle to try and find a way for the Senate to do its work in a bipartisan fashion. I thank him for his commitment to finding bipartisanship on a subject that, by all accounts, should be bipartisan to its core and has been for much of our history.

Now, today's vote is a cloture vote simply on a motion to proceed. It presents Senators with a simple question: Should the Senate even debate—debate—voting rights? That is what this is about, simply a debate and an important one to be sure.

No Republican is being asked to sign their name to this or that policy today, but they are being asked to come to the table and have a discussion and allow amendments. I want to be clear. If Republicans join us in proceeding to this bill, I am prepared to hold a full-fledged debate worthy of the U.S. Senate. The minority will have the chance to have their voices heard.

The Senate has already voted on more amendments than in any year

under former-President Trump, and on this legislation, again Republican Senators would be able to offer amendments. But for that to happen, we have to get on the bill today.

What we can't accept is a situation where one side is calling for bipartisan debate and bipartisan cooperation while the other refuses to even engage in a dialogue. If our Republican colleagues don't like our ideas, they have a responsibility to present their own. It is ludicrous for any Republican to assert that the Federal Government has no role to play in safeguarding elections when State laws disenfranchise American citizens.

I invite them to read the Constitution of the United States of America, which precisely empowers Congress to regulate the "times, places, and manners" of holding elections. I invite them to look at modern American history, when the Senate stepped into the breach numerous times when Jim Crow States sought to restrict the right to vote.

There is a long and hallowed tradition of the Senate, often in a bipartisan coalition, working to protect access to the franchise, and today our colleagues should vote to begin debate for how we can add to that legacy. But what Republicans should not do—they must not do—is squelch any chance—any chance—for the Senate to debate something as critical, as sacrosanct, as American as the right to vote. The clock is ticking on our chance to take meaningful action.

Our experiment in democracy has been the greatest feat of self-rule in all of modern history. We cannot allow it to backslide here in the 21st century. Today, we have a chance to begin debate on how we can prevent that from happening, but Republicans must join us in the debate and vote to allow debate to proceed. I urge my colleagues to vote yes.

BUILD BACK BETTER

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now on another matter, BBB, Build Back Better, even as we work to push legislation in defense of our democracy, Senate Democrats are also making good progress on reaching an agreement on President Biden's Build Back Better plan.

Yesterday, Senate Democrats had a very spirited and very positive caucus lunch to go over the latest outstanding items before we can all reach a deal. We walked out of that lunch united in our desire to reach an agreement this week. I believe we can get it done, and I want to thank all my colleagues for their leadership, diligence, and focus on reaching an end result. We are going to keep talking to each other all week long until we get the job done.

Later this morning, I will speak again with the Speaker and with the White House to go over the latest details of the President's proposal. I have spoken to the President just about

every day and Speaker PELOSI several times a day about these issues. I will continue meeting with my caucus to try and keep us all on the same page because be on the same page we must. Everyone is going to have to compromise if we are going to find that legislative sweet spot we can all get behind.

Nobody will get everything they want, but no matter what, our final proposal will deliver the core promise we made to the American people: We will take bold action against the climate crisis while creating millions of new, good-paying jobs; we will expand economic opportunity and lower costs for working Americans; and we will cut taxes for working and middle-class Americans while asking the wealthy to pay their fair share. In short, we will deliver on a bill that dramatically improves the lives of millions and millions and millions of American families.

We are getting closer to an agreement. We want to finalize a deal by the end of this week, but we all must keep moving together.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, and finally on nominations, yesterday, I was proud to announce my recommendation of a great New Yorker and a great friend to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to Jamaica, Nick Perry, of my hometown of Brooklyn. I cannot think of a better person to represent our country in Jamaica than Assemblyman Perry. If confirmed, he would be the first-ever Jamaican-born American to hold that post.

I always ask folks when I am in Brooklyn, "What is the biggest island in the Caribbean?" I tell them it is a trick question. They guess, "Well, maybe it is Haiti; maybe it is Barbados; maybe it is Cuba." I say, "No, it is Brooklyn," which has more Caribbean immigrants than anywhere else.

So Nick Perry's nomination is great news for our community and our country. For decades, Assemblyman Perry has served Brooklyn by doing things the old-fashioned way: working hard, never resting on his laurels, and earning the trust of the people he represents. He is a true American success story: an immigrant, a veteran of the Army, and a graduate of Brooklyn College. I know he will do excellent work as our next Ambassador.

From Patrick Ewing to KRS-One, from Vice President KAMALA HARRIS to Congresswoman YVETTE CLARKE, to the late General Powell, Jamaican Americans hold a key place in our Nation's rich legacy. Nick Perry will continue adding to this legacy, as he has for decades, and I am proud to support him as a nominee for Ambassador.

And, finally, today, the Senate will also move forward on Catherine Lhamon to be Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the Department of Education. All her career, Ms. Lhamon has